

What is claimed is:

1. A method in an interactive television system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller

5 and a user of the interactive television system;

identifying the caller from information contained within the request;

notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and

in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the

request within an established time interval:

10 sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller; and

recording a video message comprising a video signal received

from the caller.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein identifying comprises:

extracting an identifier of the caller from the request.

15 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the identifier is selected from the group consisting of a name of the caller, a network address of the caller, a network address of an interactive television system of the caller, an image depicting the caller, and a video signal depicting the caller.

20 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the request comprises a video signal generated by a video camera associated with the caller, and wherein notifying comprises:

displaying the video signal on a display device of the interactive television system.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein displaying comprises:
displaying the video signal in a Picture-in-Picture (PIP) window on the
display device.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
5 while the video message is being recorded, establishing two-way video
communication between the user and the caller in response to a
user command.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein recording of the video message
continues during the two-way video communication.
- 10 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the two-way video communication
comprises incoming and outgoing video signals, the method further comprising:
storing the incoming and outgoing video signals.
9. The method of claim 6, further comprising:
15 buffering a television signal being currently displayed by the interactive
television system.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein buffering comprises:
encoding the television broadcast; and
storing the encoded television broadcast in a storage device.
11. The method of claim 9, further comprising:
20 in response to the two-way video communication being terminated,
playing back the television signal being buffered from a point in
time at which the two-way video communication was
established.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the pre-recorded video greeting is caller-specific.

13. A method in an interactive television system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

5 detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller
and a user of the interactive television system;
identifying the caller from information contained within the request;
determining whether the caller is identified within an auto-answer list;
and
10 in response to the caller being included within the auto-answer list:
automatically sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the
caller; and
automatically recording a video message comprising a video
signal received from the caller.

14. A method in an interactive television system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method comprising:

detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller
and a user of the interactive television system;
identifying the caller from information contained within the request;
20 notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and
in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the
request within an established time interval:
sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller;

recording a video message comprising a video signal received
 from the caller;
 while the video message is being recorded, establishing two-
 way video communication between the user and the
 caller in response to a user command;
 buffering a television signal being displayed by the interactive
 television system; and
 in response to the two-way video communication being
 terminated, playing back the television signal being
 buffered from a point in time at which the two-way video
 communication was established.

15. A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the
 system comprising:

- a detection component configured to detect a request to establish
 video communication between a caller and a user of the
 interactive television system;
- an identification component configured to identify the caller from
 information contained within the request;
- a notification component configured to notify the user concerning the
 identity of the caller; and
- an answering component configured to send a pre-recorded video
 greeting to the caller and to record a video message comprising
 a video signal received from the caller in response to the user
 rejecting the request or not accepting the request within an
 established time interval.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein the identification component is further configured to extract an identifier of the caller from the request.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the identifier is selected from the group consisting of a name of the caller, a network address of the caller, a network address of an interactive television system of the caller, an image depicting the caller, and a video signal depicting the caller.

18. The system of claim 15, wherein the request comprises a video signal generated by a video camera associated with the caller, and wherein the notification component is further configured to display the video signal on a display device of the interactive television system.

19. The system of claim 18, wherein the notification component is further configured to display the video signal in a Picture-in-Picture (PIP) window on the display device.

20. The system of claim 15, further comprising:

a communication component configured to establish two-way video communication between the user and the caller while the video message is being recorded.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein recording of the video message continues during the two-way video communication.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the two-way video communication comprises incoming and outgoing video signals, and wherein the answering component is further configured to store the incoming and outgoing video signals.

23. The system of claim 20, further comprising:
a buffering component configured to buffer a television signal being
currently displayed by the interactive television system.
24. The system of claim 23, wherein buffering component comprises:
an encoder configured to encode the television broadcast; and
a storage device configured to store the encoded television broadcast.
25. The system of claim 23, further comprising:
a playback component configured to play back the television signal
being buffered from a point in time at which the two-way video
communication was established in response to the two-way
video communication being terminated,.
26. The system of claim 15, wherein the pre-recorded video greeting is
caller-specific.
27. A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the
system comprising:
a detection component configured to detect a request to establish
video communication between a caller and a user of the
interactive television system;
an identification component configured to identify the caller from
information contained within the request;
an answering component configured, in response to the caller being
included within an auto-answer list, to automatically send a pre-
recorded video greeting to the caller and automatically record a

video message comprising a video signal received from the caller.

28. A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the system comprising:

- 5 a detection component configured to detect a request to establish video communication between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;
- an identification component configured to identify the caller from information contained within the request;
- 10 a notification component configured to notify the user concerning the identity of the caller; and
- an answering component configured to send a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the request within an established time interval and to record a video message comprising a video
- 15 signal received from the caller;
- a communication component configured, while the video message is being recorded, to establish two-way video communication between the user and the caller;
- 20 a buffering component configured to buffer a television signal being displayed by the interactive television system; and
- a playback component configured to play back the television signal being buffered from a point in time at which the two-way video communication was established in response to the two-way
- 25 video communication being terminated.

29. A system for automatically answering and recording video calls, the system comprising:

means for detecting a request to establish video communication
between a caller and a user of the interactive television system;
5 means for identifying the caller from information contained within the
request;
means for notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and
means for sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller and for
recording a video message comprising a video signal received
10 from the caller in response to the user rejecting the request or
not accepting the request within an established time interval,.

30. A computer program product comprising program code for performing
a method for automatically answering and recording video calls, the method
comprising:

15 detecting a request to establish video communication between a caller
and a user of the interactive television system;
identifying the caller from information contained within the request;
notifying the user concerning the identity of the caller; and
in response to the user rejecting the request or not accepting the
20 request within an established time interval:
sending a pre-recorded video greeting to the caller; and
recording a video message comprising a video signal received
from the caller.